Letters to the Editor

10/17/89

To tell the truth

In his Friday, Sept. 22, letter headed "Bad reporting hurts the First Amendment" John C. Laughland states an important truth: Too much modern reporting is obviously inaccurate when it need not be, as is column writing. In the latter category he singled out Roy Meachum, as I also have. By inference Mr. Laughland says that if those of us who are not reporting can know the truth, why don't the reporters and columnists take the time to learn the truth?

My own reporting days are far in the past but I've never lost my interest in it and I have observed it closely, more in the past 25 years, when my own work has been reported widely and has been the subject of columnists.

On issues of national and international affairs non-metropolitan papers even with the best of intention, which not all have, the editors simply do not and cannot have the background necessary, particularly with columns, and do not have the time to be fully informed on these matters.

A recent example of this in the local papers is Scripps-Howard columnist Leonard Larsen's piece on the truly awful problem of cocaine and the so-called Medellin cartel that distributes most of it. That column said, with no ifs or buts, that the cartel's murderous thugs were trained by Israelis sent by that government. It concluded with the question, "Is this the way you want your tax dollars spent?"

Any reporter or columnist who made any effort to learn what the amply-reported facts are would have known that nationals of a number of countries trained those Colombian murderers, that the Israelis were a minority and that most came from Great Britain.

There just is no excuse at all for this kind of hate propaganda foisted off on trusting editors and their readers. It cannot be reconciled with any reasonable interpretation of column writing and it does "hurt the First Amendment."

Similarly, one of Roy Meachum's relatively recent columns blamed Christian Arabs for the awful situation in devastated Lebanon. Mr. Meachum has a career of denouncing Israel for all the evils of that part of the world, this one blaming the Christian Arabs, but there has not been a peep out of him about Syria's murderous occupation of so much of Lebanon.

The world and its politics have become enormously complex, so complex that the metropolitan papers require many experts among their editors. Non-metropolitan papers simply cannot cope with these complexities.

This does not excuse their publishing inaccurate information and hate propaganda because there are always those on whom they can call with questions. In my own work in the recent past I've responded to questions of fact from TV producers and writers from Los Angeles to London (BBC-TV numerous times), reporters from all over, and book publishers and magazine writers.

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